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Districtwide System for Providing Individual Student Support

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Although schools generally provide safe environments, teachers, staff, parents, and students are concerned with the rising level of disruptive, antisocial behavior (Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001). Only a relatively small number of students in a school building engage in the most serious and/or chronic problem behaviors. However, these students account for about 50% of the incidents handled by office staff and dominate a majority of staff time (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1994). Recent research recommends addressing individual student needs within a schoolwide discipline system. The purpose of this article was to provide an overview of individual student systems, identify guidelines for implementing a function-based model, and describe a case study of a district's attempts to build a comprehensive district-based individual student support systems cadre.

The 2001 Surgeon General's report noted that while youth homicide has decreased over the past five years, the instance of less violent, antisocial crimes continues to escalate (Surgeon General, 2001). Such findings immediately focus attention on the nation's public schools. The discrepancy between identified needs and available resources leave schools struggling to (a) meet the academic and social needs of their students, (b) support staff, (c) respond to issues of the parents and community members, and (d) implement state and federally mandated initiatives with fidelity. Although schools continue to provide safe environments, teachers, staff, parents, and students are concerned with the rising level of disruptive, antisocial behavior (Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001).

Consistently the general public rate (a) fighting, violence, gangs, (b) lack of discipline, (c) lack of funding, and (d) use of drugs

as the top four biggest problems facing local schools (Rose & Gallup, 1998). Due to increased expectations coupled with a lack of resources and training, teachers often turn to the easiest management system to control behavior: reactive punishment-based approaches. Unfortunately, these approaches are the least effective (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994, 1999). Only a relatively small number of students in a school building engage in the most serious and/or chronic problem behaviors. However, these students account for about 50% of the incidents handled by office staff and dominate a majority of staff time (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1994).

Recent research is recommending a systems approach to addressing student needs that begins by establishing proactive schoolwide discipline systems. Schools that invest in a comprehensive schoolwide approach experience reductions in overall discipline rates,

increased instructional minutes, and fewer students identified as needing specialized, individualized, and intensive behavior support. However, implementation and maintenance of a proactive system takes a major commitment by the school administration and all of the staff. A sustainable system generally takes between two to four years to build.

Overview of Schoolwide Discipline

Effective Behavior Support (EBS) is a systems approach to schoolwide discipline designed to enhance the capacity of schools to educate all students, especially students with challenging social behaviors, by establishing an efficient and effective model of (a) systems that support staff, (b) practices that support students, and (c) data collection and use that guide decision-making (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 1994, 1999).

EBS focuses on four subsystems: schoolwide, classroom, non-classroom, and individual student. The *schoolwide* system focuses on all students, staff, and settings at all times, is intended to shape a positive school culture, and provides a foundation for the remaining three systems. The *classroom* system addresses the establishment of effective classroom behavior management and instruction. *Non-classroom* refers to common settings within the school such as hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds, and/or bathrooms. Finally, the *individual student* system provides additional support to students who are not responsive to the efforts of the other three systems.

One of the most important elements of schoolwide behavior support is its three-level structure that includes (a) universal interventions, (b) targeted group interventions, and (c) targeted individual interventions. The intensity of support increases by level and is matched to the level of student need. By tailoring the level of support to students' needs, a school is able to use limited resources efficiently and provide support to all students.

Universal interventions. The first level, universal interventions, which are part of the schoolwide discipline system for all students, staff, and settings, is effective for 80% of students. The focus is on establishing a common approach to discipline and includes (a) 3-5 short, memorable, and clearly and positively stated behavioral expectations, (b) procedures for teaching these expectations to all students, (c) a continuum of procedures for encouraging the expectations, (d) a continuum of procedures for discouraging rule violations, and (e) procedures for monitoring student behavior and modifying implementation strategies.

Targeted group interventions. The next level includes a specialized group-administered system for students who display high-risk problem behavior and are unresponsive to universal interventions. The intent is to provide support for a group of students (10-15% of the student population) who need additional support but do not require specialized, individualized, and intensive interventions.

Based on a functional perspective, this level involves (a) daily behavioral monitoring, (b) a link to schoolwide discipline (e.g., behavioral expectations), (c) frequent and regular opportunities for positive reinforcement, (d) a home-school connection, and (e) individualized academic accommodations (Hawken & Horner, 2003; March & Horner, 2002).

Targeted individual interventions. The third level is a specialized individually administered system for students who display the most challenging problem behavior and have been unresponsive to targeted group interventions. Thus, the level is intended to support a relatively small number of students (1-5% of the student enrollment) who have intense social behavioral needs that are unmet by the previously discussed levels.

At this level, staff are provided with a simple request for assistance which involves an immediate response (24-48 hours) to that request. The immediate response is to inform

the staff that the request has been received and that certain steps of the support process will be initiated (i.e., functional behavior assessment-based support planning). A team-based approach to problem solving with at least one team with behavioral competence guides this process. Students at this level require a comprehensive and multicomponent response that may include wraparound support.

Overview of Individual Student System

Once a schoolwide system including all three support levels is established, schools are better able to support the needs of students with intense and chronic behavior problems. However, providing specialized behavior support remains difficult. Schools frequently report that such efforts are hindered because too many students display significant problems at one time and that these problem behaviors are high in intensity and/or frequency. Even after completing a functional behavior assessment, some students' problem behaviors remain difficult to understand or the function-based support is ineffective (i.e., too little change, too slow). Finally, schools report that there is not enough time to collect information, conduct meetings, and implement and monitor plans, and that administrative leadership and support is either lacking, unavailable, or underdeveloped.

There are several reasons why, even with a sound foundation, implementation of behavior support fails. Some of these reasons relate to the behavioral competence within the school building. For example, behavior intervention may be of low quality (i.e., poor match between strategy and function of problem behavior, use of nonresearch-based strategies). Additionally, behavior intervention plans may be based on nonmeasurable outcomes or poor quality data for decision-making. Other reasons for failed behavior support relate to systemic factors. For example, well-written plans may be implemented with low

fidelity because staff members lack support for their efforts or there is limited or insufficient monitoring of implementation and impact of interventions. Finally, schools may struggle to provide support because of inadequate systemic support for implementers at classroom, school, and district levels.

One solution is to build systems that facilitate individual student support and parallel those established to guide the sustained implementation of the schoolwide efforts. The general features of an individual student system are similar to those found at the schoolwide level and include:

- Establishing a team-based approach and process to problem solving
- Matching the intensity and complexity of FBA and BIP to the intensity & complexity of behavior
- Increasing efficiency with data-based decision-making to identify students with more intense needs early and easily
- Identifying and training behaviorally competent individuals to guide the process
- Providing staff with sustained and effective support to respond effectively and efficiently

Similar to the schoolwide model presented above, individual student systems are divided into subsystems. Each subsystem—classroom, school, and district—represents an increase in the intensity of the problem behaviors and a matched increase in the intensity of the required assessments and interventions.

Classroom-based support, the first subsystem, involves strategies and practices implemented by the classroom teacher. System features at this level are intended to increase the instructional and behavioral capacity of classroom teachers and prevent the need for more intensive support. However, support at each level begins with a quick assessment of student behavior to identify the level of support anticipated (i.e., classroom-, school-, or district-based). Key to a systems approach is the

Figure 1. Overview of individual student support system.

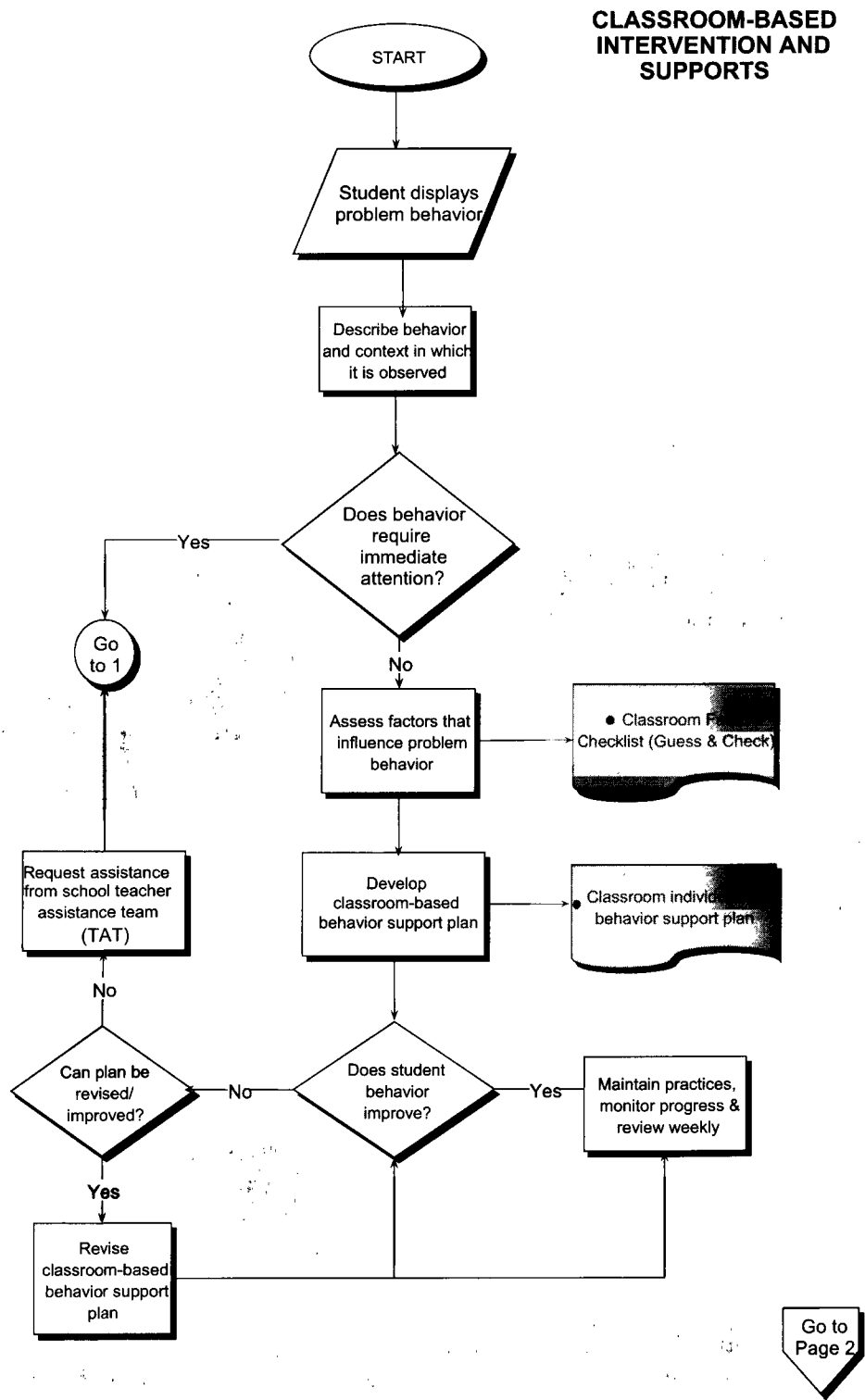


Figure 1. Continued

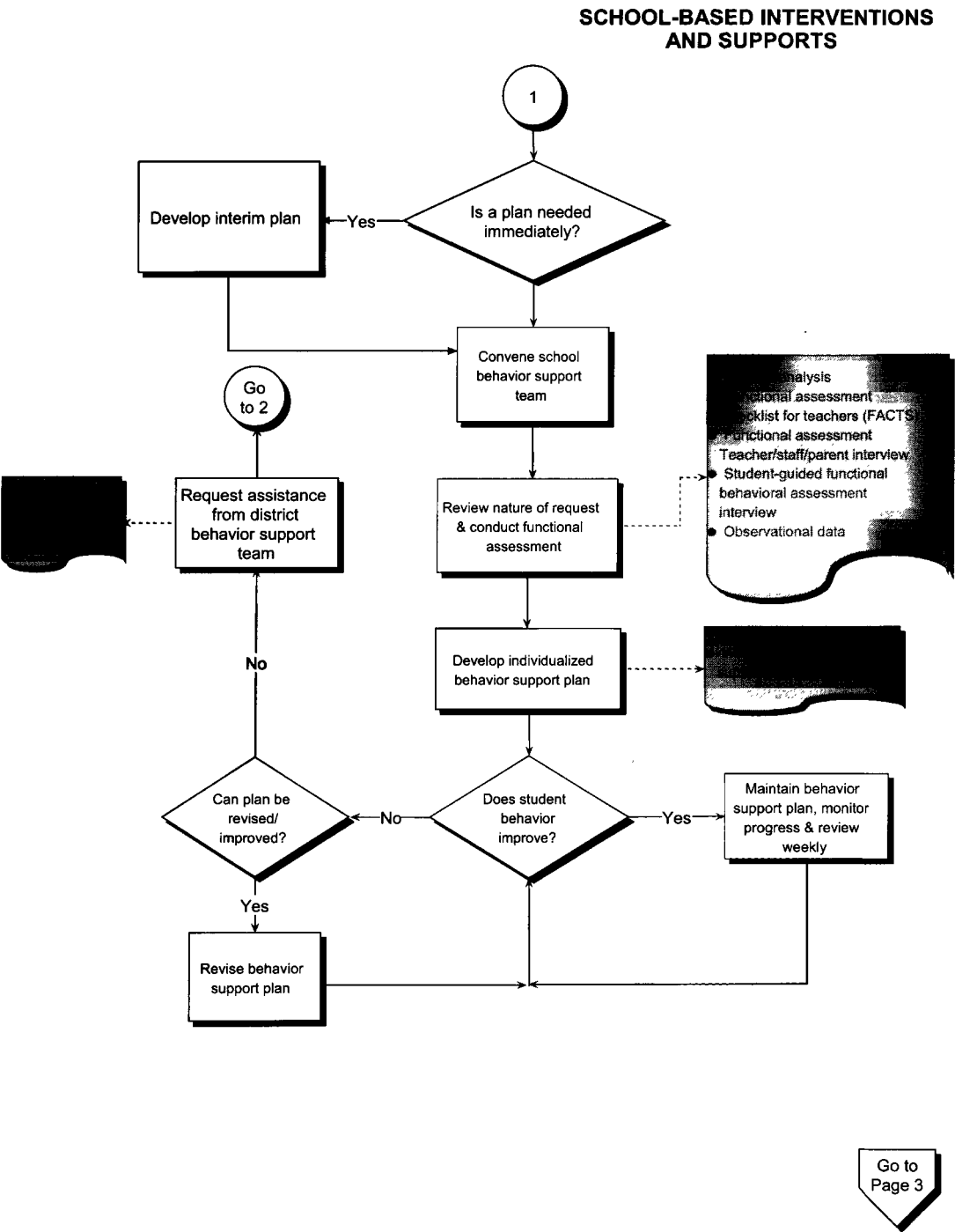
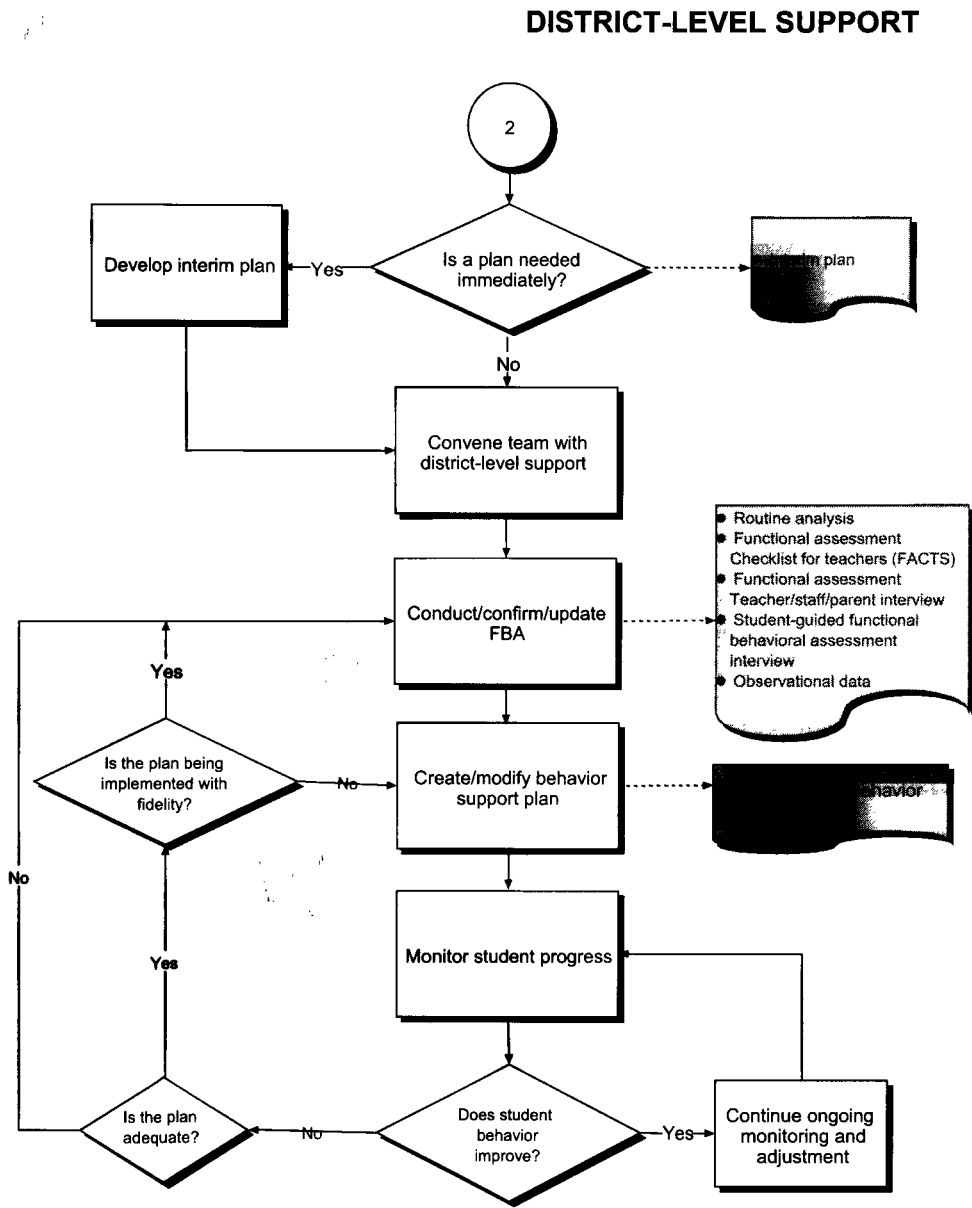


Figure 1. Continued



ability to match the level of support to the level of need. Therefore, a student with severe and/or dangerous behaviors would immediately be referred for district-based support and not be expected to progress through the two other subsystems only to receive an inadequate level of support. At the district level, teachers are expected to adopt a function-based approach that focuses on instruction and behavior. In addition to a focus on functional behavior assessment (Ervin, DuPaul, Kern, & Friman, 1998), there is a strong research base connecting student problem behavior to instructional practices (e.g., Gunter, Hummel, & Venn, 2000; Shores & Wehby, 1999; Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996; Wehby, Symons, & Canale, 1998). Assessing both instructional and behavior management practices will not only reduce the number of students requiring additional support but also provide a foundation for students who need more intensive interventions.

The school-based subsystem incorporates both the targeted group and targeted individual interventions described earlier. However, the focus is on the systems that support the staff in implementing the function-based practices. Key to this level is an efficient identification and assessment process that matches students to the appropriate level of support. Other systems features include ongoing monitoring of fidelity of implementation and effectiveness of interventions. Critical to this is clearly defined data for decision-making, set routines for analysis and feedback, and a decision-making process to help determine when support should be maintained, modified, faded, or referred for district-based support.

The final subsystem involves district-based support for the small percent of students for whom school-based interventions are unsuccessful. Students at this level frequently require coordination of services within the school (e.g., teacher, counselor, school psychologist, administrator) and with community agencies (e.g., mental health, medical, juvenile justice). Identifying a district-level

coordinator and including key individuals on the district-based team facilitates communication and coordination of support. Further, having a set meeting structure promotes identification of students, provides opportunities for technical assistance, and allows the district to utilize resources efficiently. The case study included in this article illustrates one school district's attempt to establish an individual student system. The focus of the case study is on the district-based level of support.

Guidelines for Implementation

Although the specific details of a function-based systems approach will vary based on the unique characteristics of each classroom, school, and district, a number of common supporting requirements have emerged. The first is the application of behavioral theory to guide the systematic data-based assessment and behavior intervention planning.

Second, a team-based process should lead the implementation of a function-based approach. Three levels of teams are required. A *schoolwide team* should be responsible for managing the full continuum of behavior support in the school, including all subsystems. Members of this team should be representative of the whole school staff. A *school-based behavior support team*, focused on the students who are non-responsive to universal interventions, is responsible for conducting functional behavioral assessments, developing and implementing individualized behavior intervention plans, and monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of these plans. Members of this team know the student well and/or have the behavioral expertise to conduct functional assessments and develop and implement behavior intervention plans. Membership of this team may change with the student who is being considered. Finally, there is a *district-based behavior support team*. This team, led by district-level administrators and a behavior specialist, should include representatives from every school. School repre-

sentatives are responsible for facilitating communication within and across schools, and providing advanced behavior support to staff within their school buildings.

School- and district-level administrative support is necessary for securing resources (e.g., time, personnel, funding) for staff development and sustained implementation, establishing and maintaining implementation policy and priority, providing contingencies for accurate and durable implementation, and acknowledging staff effort and success.

Data-based approaches that enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of decisions that are made at the schoolwide and individual student levels are required. For example, data should guide evaluation of prerequisite schoolwide systems, assist in early identification of students at risk, determine the level of support necessary to support students and staff, direct the assessment process, and assist in evaluating of intervention effectiveness.

Finally, a function-based support approach emphasizes the use of evidence-based practices and strategies to build behavioral intervention plans. Evidenced-based refers to strategies for which empirical evidence documented effectiveness exist.

Case Study

Overview of District

The district, located in the Pacific Northwest, is comprised of 11 schools, including a high school, an alternative high school, two middle schools, five elementary schools, and two K-8th grade schools. The district serves about 5,400 students; general demographics include 42% of students eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch, 18% receiving Title I services, and 15% receiving special education. It is a rapidly growing district with about 5% annual growth. The district has low-income housing and transient hotels within its boundaries leading to high student mobility.

Every school participates in a systemwide discipline project both at the school and district level. The schoolwide project is guided by a leadership team that meets monthly to identify, organize, and coordinate district efforts and provide appropriate training to school teams. Members of the leadership team include the director and assistant director of special services, schoolwide coordinator, multicultural coordinator, curriculum director, behavior specialist, and University of Oregon faculty. The primary responsibilities of the district coordinator are to serve as liaison to district administration, coordinate district support, provide direct technical assistance to school teams and administrators, and conduct assessment and evaluation of the project.

Prerequisites for Establishing an Individual Student System

The efficiency and effectiveness of implementation of an individual student support system are related directly to the effectiveness and efficiency of schoolwide behavior support systems for all students, staff, and settings. Therefore, established schoolwide discipline systems, school administrator support, and district administrator support are prerequisites to implementation of an individual student system. All schools had existing schoolwide discipline teams within their buildings and had established a level of implementation considered necessary for participation in the district individual student system.

Two measures were used to determine level of eligibility. Staff within the school completed an annual survey assessing the status of schoolwide systems (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Staff rated several items as either In Place, Partially in Place, or Not in Place. The second measure involved the Systems-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) (Horner et al., in press). The SET is a validated assessment tool that measures the level of implementation of schoolwide discipline across seven features (a) expectations defined, (b) expectations taught,

(c) appropriate behavior acknowledged, (d) problem behavior corrected, (e) monitoring and evaluation, (f) management, and (g) district support. The prerequisite criterion was established as a minimum score of 80% of items In Place/Partially in Place for the survey and an 80% overall mean on the SET. The average mean on the survey for either In Place or Partially in Place across schools was 98.5 with a range of 97.3-98.8. All schools met the 80% mean (calculated from mean percent items in place scored on the seven features) with a mean of 94.8 and a range of 87.5-100%.

Bethel Individual Students Systems Cadre (BISSC)

BISSC is a districtwide team that started in the winter of 2002 and is focused on providing support to students with intense behavioral needs. The purpose of this team was to (a) develop and support individuals with behavior competence within each of the schools, (b) create efficient and effective systems to support the individual student process, and (c) establish ongoing support and technical assistance within and across schools. The behavior specialist and a university liaison co-directed BISSC and were responsible for managing meetings, providing training, preparing materials, and evaluating impact.

The behavior specialist explained the BISSC model to principals and invited them to send staff members, who were (a) interested in gaining behavioral competence, (b) willing to provide FBA-BIP support within their school, and (c) connected with their school's teacher assistance team. During the 2002-03 school year, 34 school personnel representing all schools, except the high school and the alternative high school, participated in BISSC. Neither of the high schools met the prerequisite criterion, but were invited to attend meetings to assist their schools in establishing school-based systems. Members

were from a variety of positions within the schools, including resource/special education teachers, counselors, school psychologists, behavior assistants, general education teachers, speech/language specialists, Title I teachers, and a life skills teacher. The schoolwide coordinator, assistant superintendent of student support, and three other university personnel periodically attended meetings.

BISSC meetings occurred twice a month for about 1.5-2 hours. A typical meeting included content presentation to establish a common knowledge base, brief case presentations from BISSC members, time for school teams to work on their systems development, and time for mentor teams to work on problem solving/technical assistance. Additionally, BISSC members received an implementation manual.

Content presentations. Presentations focused on the FBA-BIP process and were intended to serve as review as well as to ensure that members had a common foundation. Topics covered during the year included an overview of a systems approach, a function-based approach, defining behavior, developing testable hypotheses, observation procedures, developing competing behavior pathways, linking FBA and IEP, developing BIPs, and legal requirements. Halfway through the school year, two separate groups were formed. The first group requested a more in-depth review of concepts, whereas the second group requested time to work with each other on their students with the most intense support needs.

Case presentations. BISSC members were asked to present to the group a student they had worked with or were currently working with. At a minimum, case presentations included (a) a description of the student, (b) a summary of FBA activities and resulting hypothesis statement, and (c) a competing pathways analysis. If available, BISSC members were encouraged to present the BIP, including materials developed for implementation and data evaluating the impact of the intervention. The goal of case presentations

Table 1 Satisfaction Survey of BISSC Model

Item	Mean
5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=no change, 2-disagree, 1=strongly disagree	
Having school team meeting time improved communication within your school.	4.3
We should continue to have school team time.	4.6
Having mentor team meeting time improved communication across schools.	3.3
We should continue to have mentor team time.	3.8
BISSC made it easier for you to complete FBA-BIPs.	3.7
My school team completed more FBA-BIPs this year as a result of BISSC.	2.1
My school BIPs were more effective as a result of BISSC.	3.5
BISSC made me more confident at completing an FBA.	3.6
BISSC made me more confident at completing a BIP.	3.8
BISSC made me more confident at supporting staff within my school.	3.8
My school has a process for referring students to BISSC.	3.2

was twofold: (a) to allow members to learn from each others examples, and (b) to increase fluency by requiring members to present a summary and rationale of their assessment activities.

School teams. While the intent of BISSC was to expand on school-level support, a request was made for school teams to have time to review and refine existing systems. Initially, meetings included about 30 minutes of school team time. Toward the end of the year, the number of minutes allotted to school teams was reduced to 10, and the focus switched to monitoring students in need of support. Teams were asked to update and submit a monthly tracking sheet of all students within the school requiring support beyond that provided by their classroom teacher.

Mentor teams. The majority of meeting

time (about 45 minutes) was designated for mentor teams. The goal of these teams was to establish a technical assistance network across schools; teams were comprised of individuals from different schools. Mentor team membership was tied to either a counselor or a school psychologist and included representatives from the schools on this person's case load. For example, one counselor divided his time across two elementary schools; therefore, his mentor team was comprised of the BISSC members from those two schools. After piloting several mentor team configurations, this last model was chosen because of the natural link the counselors and school psychologists provided within the district.

Implementation manual. The implementation manual was intended to serve as a resource manual for BISSC members. Eight

Figure 2. Monthly student tracking sheet.

MONTHLY INDIVIDUAL STUDENT TRACKING SHEET FOR _____

NAME	January 2003					February				
	Progress	Action	Level of Support	Safety Concerns	Addressed in BIP	Progress	Action	Level of Support	Safety Concerns	Addressed in BIP?
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a
	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a	Yes Some No	Fade Same Modify	School BISSC District	Yes No	Yes No n/a

sections addressed either a specific level of support (i.e., classroom, school, or district) or provided general information and guidelines for a function-based process of student support. Individual sections were as follows: (a) introduction to the district-based model, including the flow-chart describing the continuum of support; (b) information for contacting other members, tracking sheets, etc.; (c-e) a section covering the process, trouble shooting tips, case examples, and forms for each of the three levels of the flow-chart-classroom, school, and district; (f) FBA-BIP

review that corresponded to the content presentations; (g) information on maintaining, fading, and transitioning support; and (h) reference lists of relevant publications.

Satisfaction survey. BISSC members were asked to complete a satisfaction survey that addressed the school team and mentor team structures and the impact that BISSC had on their and their schools ability to complete FBA-BIPs. Members asked to rate items using a 5-point Likert scale with 5 indicating strong agreement and 1 indicating strong disagreement. Overall, members rated school team

time as having improved communication (4.3) recommended that it be continued (4.6). Ratings for the mentor team time were lower than for the school team (3.3 for communication, and 3.8 for continuation). Reorganization of mentor teams linking schools by related support staff (i.e., counselor, school psychologist) was based on this feedback, but occurred late in the year; therefore, staff were not asked to reevaluate their satisfaction with mentor team time.

Rates for impact of BISSC on school implementation were 3.5-3.8 for all but two items (see Table 1). Given that this was the first year in a systems change process, scores below 4.0-5.0 are not unexpected. However, it is necessary to continue to track satisfaction to determine if the current model improves the schools' ability to provide function-based support. The two items rated below 3.5 related to having a referral process and the number of FBA-BIPs that the school was able to complete. Again, given the preliminary efforts of this project these results are not surprising.

Summary

There is a growing trend is toward using systems to facilitate the adoption and use of function-based support; however, little research on the impact of these systems exists. This case study provides a description of one district's initial attempts to develop and implement a comprehensive individual student system. While initial results are promising, it is necessary to experimentally validate the impact via office discipline referral patterns, assessment of implementation of critical system features similar to those found in the SET, and evaluation of the quality of FBA-BIPs generated by BISSC members. This case study is descriptive and does not allow for any experimental validation of the process. A logical next step is replication of BISSC with other districts documenting the resources required for successful implementation and sustainability. Given the limitations

of the case study, BISSC appears to have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of school and district function-based support while continuing to build the district's behavioral capacity and overall organizing structure.

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